

What is claimed is:

1. A directing device for controlling the orientation of a ball launching device, comprising:
 - a first member;
 - a second member pivotally attached to the first member;
 - a third member rotatably connected to the second member and operably configured to receive the ball launching device;
 - a first actuator connected to the first and second members; and,
 - a second actuator connected to the first and third members,wherein when the first actuator is actuated the second member pivots relative to the first member, and when the second actuator is actuated the third member rotates relative to the second member.
2. A device, as recited in claim 1, wherein the third member is disposed substantially parallel to the second member.
3. A device, as recited in claim 1, wherein at least one of the first, second and third members has a generally plate-like shape.
4. A device, as recited in claim 1, wherein the second member is pivotally attached to the first member via at least one hinge attached to a periphery portion of the first member and a first periphery portion of the second member.
5. A device, as recited in claim 4, wherein the first actuator is pivotally attached to a second periphery portion of the second member, and the second periphery portion is substantially diametrically opposed to the first periphery portion of the second member.

6. A device, as recited in claim 1, wherein the second member is pivotable from about 0 degrees to about 90 degrees relative to the first member.

7. A device, as recited in claim 1, further comprising a shaft attached to the second member, wherein the third member rotates about a shaft.

8. A device, as recited in claim 1, further comprising a bearing member, wherein the bearing member is disposed between the second and third members.

9. A device, as recited in claim 1, further comprising a bracket pivotally attached to the first member, and wherein the first actuator is attached to the first member via the bracket.

10. A device, as recited in claim 1, further comprising:

a first attachment member disposed at a first periphery portion of the third member; and,

linkage selectively attachable to the first attachment member,

wherein the second actuator is attached to the third member via the linkage.

11. A device, as recited in claim 10, wherein the linkage comprises:

a swivel link member having a first end and a second end;

a pivot link member having a first end that pivots about a point on the first member and a second end pivotally attached to the first end of the swivel link member; and,

a universal joint fixed to the second end of the swivel link member and removably attached to the first attachment member; and,

wherein the second actuator having a first end fixed to the first member and a second extendable end pivotally fixed to the pivot link member.

12. A device as recited in claim 10, further comprising a second attachment bracket selectively attachable to the second actuator and attached to the third member at a second periphery portion, wherein the second periphery portion of the third member is about 90 degrees from the first periphery portion of the third member.

13. A device, as recited in claim 12, wherein at least one of the first and second attachment brackets includes a bracket member attached to the third member, a connecting member attachable to the second actuator and a hinge connecting the bracket member to the connecting member.

14. A device as recited in claim 1, further including a mounting bracket attached to the third member and operably configured to receive an attachment plate, wherein the attachment plate is operably configured to secure the ball launching device.

15. An automatic ball throwing device, comprising:

a ball directing assembly having a first member, a second member pivotally attached to the first member, a third member disposed substantially parallel to the second member and rotatably connected to the second member, a first actuator connected to the first and second members, and a second actuator connected to the first and third members; and,

a ball launching device connected to the third member,

wherein orientation of the ball launching device is controlled by actuation of the first and second actuators such that when the first actuator is actuated the second member pivots relative to the first member and when the second actuator is actuated the third member rotates relative to the second member.

16. A ball throwing device, as recited in claim 15, further comprising a ball hopper attached to the ball launching device and operably configured to deliver balls to the ball launching device.

17. A ball throwing device, as recited in claim 15, further comprising a support stand, wherein the first member of the ball directing device is attached to the support stand.

18. A ball hopper for use with a ball launching device, comprising:

a bin having an opening;

a delivery portion having a ball channel, the delivery portion is attachable to the ball launching device;

a chute having a first and second end, the first end is in communication with the opening of the bin and the second end is in communication with the ball channel;

a ball gate disposed along the length of the chute; and

a ball pushing member disposed adjacent the ball channel,

wherein activation of the ball gate allows a ball from the bin to travel through the chute into the ball channel of the delivery portion, and activation of the ball pushing member moves the ball out of the ball channel to the ball launching device.

19. A ball hopper, as recited in claim 18, further comprising:

an auger disposed adjacent the opening in the bin; and

at least one support leg attached to at least one of the bin and the chute and attachable to a ball directing device.

20. A ball hopper, as recited in claim 18 further comprising a swivel joint connecting the second end of the chute the delivery portion, wherein the chute and the bin are rotatable about the delivery portion.

21. A method of making an automatic ball throwing device, comprising:
obtaining a pitching machine having a ball launching device and a support stand;
removing the ball launching device from the support stand;
attaching a directing device to the support stand; and
attaching the ball launching device to the third member of the directing device.

22. A method, as recited in claim 21, further comprising:
attaching a ball hopper to the ball launching device; and
securing the ball hopper to the ball directing device,
wherein the directing device includes a first member attachable to the support stand, a second member pivotally attached to the first member, a third member disposed substantially parallel to the second member and rotatably connected to the second member, a first actuator connected to the first and second members, and a second actuator connected to the first and third members.